

'Self-Serving' Leaks Eyed

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The State Department made a commitment yesterday to investigate itself over leaks of classified information in an article that lauded Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger's Middle East diplomacy.

This decision focuses attention on one of the least-explored areas in the controversy over leaks of government secrets: self-serving disclosures by the executive branch itself.

Kissinger was one of

many senior officials in the State Department interviewed by Edward R. F. Sheehan during a year's research for an article in the spring issue of the quarterly magazine, *Foreign Policy*.

The Sheehan article, entitled "How Kissinger Did It; Step by Step in the Middle East," contains lengthy reports of conversations between Kissinger and Arab and Israeli leaders.

Sheehan wrote that the Arab-Israeli war of October, 1973 "revealed Kissinger at the apogee of his skill," ma-

neuvering adroitly between Arab and Israeli demands to disengage the opposing forces.

It was not the praise of Kissinger that caused controversy, but the unusually detailed versions of blunt talk and diplomatic horse-trading between Kissinger, former President Nixon, President Ford, and the Middle East leaders.

Such conversations always carry one of the highest secret classifications. Kissinger last month exploded

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in outrage over the disclosure of "highly classified information" by the House intelligence committee headed by Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.).

Publication of the Sheehan article put Kissinger in the embarrassing position, if he stood silent, of condoning selective leaks that served his interests, and demanding investigation of leaks that held him up to criticism.

The House ethics committee at present is seeking \$350,000 to investigate who leaked to CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr the Pike committee report, which Kissinger charged amounted to "a malicious lie" about his activities, and "a new version of McCarthyism."

In this case the State Department already knows to whom Sheehan talked—its top officials on the Middle East. As one source said, "This will be an investigation with a small 'i,' not a capital I."

Initially, the State Department's reaction to the Sheehan article was a statement

on Friday, saying it "represented a gross violation of confidence and was not authorized by the secretary."

The department said it understood that Sheehan, formerly a U.S. information officer in the Cairo and Beirut embassies, talked to "over 60 sources on three continents" and "people in the State Department also talked to him on a background basis."

"In his contacts here," the department's statement said, "Mr. Sheehan did not see any transcripts, memoranda, or official records, and he was not authorized to quote directly anything told him here."

Kissinger told a reporter Friday that he was "thunderstruck" to see in print the reports on conversations with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Syrian President Hafez Assad, Saudi Arabia's late King Faisal, Israeli leaders, and others.

The conversations "are not verbatim," Kissinger said, "but obviously someone has read to the author from memos of conversation" and

"I did not authorize it." He labeled the disclosures "a gross breach of confidence and a gross error of judgment."

The State Department appeared disposed to let the matter rest there, at least publicly. Yesterday morning, however, New York Times columnist William Safire wrote:

"Anybody who accepts the notion that these documents could have been leaked without the permission of Henry Kissinger is living in a dream world. Despite hypocritical howls of 'unauthorized,' this was what is known in the trade as an 'authorized lead.'"

Contrasting Kissinger's outrage over the Pike committee leaks with what he called the "figleaf" disclaimer over the Sheehan leak, Safire wrote that "Mr. Kissinger's fury at leakers caused the illegal wiretaps to creation of the infamous in 1969" and ultimately led White House "plumbers" unit, which helped to doom the Nixon administration.

Faced with a rising storm, State Department spokes-

man Robert L. Funseth announced yesterday:

"Insofar as any State Department official provided Mr. Sheehan with information based directly on memoranda of conversation, this was unauthorized, a serious error of judgment, and disciplinary action will be taken."

Asked how that will be done, Funseth replied simply, "We're looking into it." When pressed, he eventually adopted the reporters' language about an "inquiry" or an "investigation."

Kissinger, he said, had met with Sheehan only "once or twice—very briefly," no more than about 30 minutes. Another official later said there was only one brief meeting and Kissinger was interrupted.

In response to Safire's charge that Kissinger himself leaked the information, Funseth replied, "That's false."

"I think we know who are the officers who helped Mr. Sheehan in good faith," said Funseth.

The spokesman said he was unable to answer at this time a barrage of other questions, including what Kissinger had authorized other officials to tell Sheehan, and exactly what kind of an inquiry is underway, and by whom.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said the subject of the Sheehan article came up at a White House meeting Sunday when President Ford men-

tioned reading excerpts of it in The Washington Post.

Nessen said the President "was given a guess (a name) of who the leaker was," by someone on the White House staff, and also was "told that it was being looked into by the appropriate department"—the State Department.

Nessen said the President "was satisfied" with this, and that as far as the press secretary knows, no formal investigation is under way, but Nessen said the suspected leaker will be confronted with the charge.

Sheehan, interviewed yesterday morning on the NBC "Today" television show, said in discussing the State Department's comments on his article, "they have questioned the use of the word 'verbatim,' but they have not questioned the accuracy of the conversations."

"I can't reveal my sources," said Sheehan, "All I can tell you is that they are primary sources."

Sheehan at present is a research fellow at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs.